

INFORMANT SAYS U.S. GOVERNMENT INVOLVED IN INTERNATIONAL WEAPONS AND NARCOTICS
MIAMI

A drug informant has told Sen. John Kerry he witnessed involvement by U.S. government agents and a Miami airline in international weapons and narcotics trafficking, The Miami News reported Thursday.

The informant is a drug smuggler who wants help getting out of an international drug cartel, the newspaper quoted the informant's lawyer as saying.

Kerry, D-Mass, is seeking immunity and protection for the informant in the hope that he will testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, according to several letters between Kerry and the U.S. Justice Department.

In a copy of an Oct. 22 letter obtained by The News, Kerry said the informant had given Kerry's staff significant information "regarding connections between narcotics trafficking and foreign governments, corruption involving past and present U.S. government officials in connection with narcotics trafficking and an eyewitness account of weapons and narcotics trafficking involving Southern Air Transport."

Southern, based at Miami International Airport, was once owned by the CIA and has been linked to a munitions-laden aircraft shot down in Nicaragua Oct. 5. Southern officials denied involvement in any illegal activity.

The informant also has offered information to the FBI, The News quoted his lawyer as saying.

Kenneth Bergquist, a Justice Department attorney, said his office and the FBI need more time to evaluate the informant's "reliability and credibility" before making any agreements.

Kerry, through his staff, refused to elaborate on the letter. He has asked the Foreign Relations Committee to investigate allegations that government agencies have been illegally involved in supplying weapons to Nicaraguan Contra forces, and is compiling a witness list for hearings planned next year, according to his staff.

Laurel Marc-Charles, a Fort Lauderdale lawyer who said she represents the informant, said he claims to be an associate of alleged Colombian drug kingpin Jorge Ochoa.

She said the informant claims to have been told by Ochoa that Ochoa was working with past and present CIA employees and private individuals to ship munitions to Colombia from south Florida and Texas.

He claims to have seen workers identified by Ochoa as CIA employees loading cocaine onto an airplane that had just unloaded an arms cache, Marc-Charles said.

Neither Bergquist nor an FBI spokesman would comment on the allegations. CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson denied any agency involvement.

Ochoa, a reputed member of the powerful Colombian drug empire known as the "Medellin Cartel," is a fugitive wanted on federal drug smuggling charges.

Kerry wrote to Bergquist that he was concerned for the informant's safety "because at least one federal informant with information about Ochoa family narcotics trafficking has been killed."

Kerry was referring to convicted drug smuggler Adler Barriman "Barry" Seal, a potential witness in a Florida drug case against Ochoa. Seal was shot to death in New Orleans shortly before he was scheduled to testify.